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# FOCUS

Newsletter for the Office for Prevention of Family Violence

## Internationally recognized psychiatrist recruited to Alberta

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"INCUBATED TERROR",  
DR. PERRY WRITES:  
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Dr Perry comes to Alberta from the Texas Children's Hospital and the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

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*"Alberta is poised to become a world leader in children's mental health," says renowned child psychiatrist Dr. Bruce Perry.*

That's why he moved to Canada from the United States and accepted the position of Medical Director, Children's Mental Health Initiative for the Alberta Mental Health Board.

"Alberta is developing a cohesive mental health plan for children," he says referring to the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative (ACYI) created by the government in 1999. The planning process brings together a cross section of departments including the Mental Health Board, Alberta Solicitor General, Alberta Children's Services and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.

Perry moved from Texas this summer where he was the Chief of Psychiatry at the Texas Children's Hospital and the Thomas Trammell Professor at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. He had been to Alberta several times for work and recreation before he took the job.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



## Internationally recognized...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

### Long list of Credentials

Perry comes to Alberta with a long list of credentials. He was the keynote speaker at the recent White House Summit on Violence. Perry is the Senior Fellow of the ChildTrauma Academy ([www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)), a Houston-based organization dedicated to research on child maltreatment.

Even with all his credentials, he steps lightly. Perry, a personable soft-spoken father of five insists, "I am one of many players working on this initiative. I'm just trying to listen and learn right now," he says.

Perry has been consulted on many high-profile incidents involving traumatized children, including the Columbine High School shootings, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the Branch Davidian siege. His expertise is catapulting the Alberta Mental Health Board onto the world scene as it releases a set of new materials to help parents, teachers and children cope with the September 11 terrorist attacks.

(See: [www.amhb.ab.ca](http://www.amhb.ab.ca) for more information.)

"With nearly half a million kids who will need help—either because they witnessed the attack or had relatives die—the scope of this tragedy will require a thoughtful, long-term mental health response," he says. Dr. Perry has already heard from several clinicians affiliated with the Alberta Mental Health Board who are ready to volunteer to go to New York. "Right now it's too chaotic to go down there, but there are many Albertans who are willing to help when the time is right," he explains.

### Trauma and biology of the brain related

Perry is a pioneer in the study of childhood brain development (See **Focus**, September 1999 and August 2000 editions). His research shows that the first three years of life are crucial to the healthy development of the child. Childhood trauma and neglect can change the biology of the brain. And he considers it an epidemic that needs earnest attention.

As he travels around the province and meets with police, teachers, parents, social workers and psychiatrists, he wants to spread the word about the importance of the early-childhood environment. In his essay, "Incubated Terror", he writes: "Very narrow windows—critical periods exist during which specific sensory experience is required for optimal organization and development of any brain area. Absent such experience and development, dysfunction is inevitable." The good news, however, is that these biological and psychological wounds can be healed.

Although Perry prefers to look and listen right now, rather than rush in and change things in Alberta, one of his most important challenges will be to educate professionals and the public about these findings. As more people realize that early life trauma can profoundly impact a child, new policies will be created to protect, nurture and heal children.

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I think I can I think I can I think I can



### Teaching optimism to teens

PROMOTING  
OPTIMISTIC  
THINKING AND LIFE  
SKILLS TO YOUNG  
PEOPLE HELPS  
ADOLESCENTS MEET  
LIFE'S CHALLENGES  
AND STRESSES AND  
HELPS REDUCE  
PROBLEMS  
ASSOCIATED WITH  
DEPRESSION.



**T**eens can learn from the story of the Little Blue Engine that climbed the big mountain while saying, "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can." That's the message of the Penn Prevention Program that teaches youth the ABCs of optimism.

Optimism is a powerful tool in protecting youth against depression. Recent studies suggest depression is increasing among youth and is occurring at a younger age.

By promoting optimistic thinking and life skills to young people, the Pennsylvania University program helps adolescents meet life's challenges and stresses. It also helps reduce problems associated with depression—from drug and alcohol abuse to delinquent behavior to suicide.

The school-based Penn Prevention Program teaches four basic skills of optimism that significantly reduce depressive symptoms and increase positive consequences.

**Skill 1: Catching automatic thoughts** The first technique adolescents need to learn is to recognize thoughts that flit across their minds when they feel worst. The program calls this technique *thought catching*. These thoughts, although barely noticed, profoundly affect mood and behavior. For instance, a student may think repeatedly: "I'm a failure", "everyone knows I'm a loser", and "things will never work out". Through the Penn Prevention Program, they learn to recognize their thoughts, especially when they're sad or irritable.

**Skill two: Evaluating automatic thoughts** The second optimism skill taught to youth is to evaluate these automatic thoughts. Was the situation as bad as they thought?

**Skill 3: Challenging automatic thoughts** Instead of jumping to conclusions, the program teaches youth to look for reasonable explanations. Rather than saying, "I'm a failure because I didn't get the part in the musical", they learn to look at the situation more rationally. Were they too nervous during the audition? Did the other contenders have more experience?

**Skill 4: Decatastrophizing** To learn this fourth skill, the program teaches students to analyze how they act when things go wrong. Do they fantasize about the most dire consequences? Although catastrophizing about the worst case is sometimes productive, it is bad use of time when these situations are unlikely to happen. It drains energy and ruins moods.

*Adapted from the article "Learning the ABCs of Accurate Optimism" by Seligman, Gillham and Reivich, found in Reaching Today's Youth, Summer 2000, Volume 4, Issue 4, National Educational Services, Bloomington, Indiana*



## Calendar of Events:

2001:2001:2001



**November 1 to 3, 2001**

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
Second Canadian Conference  
on Shaken Baby Syndrome

This conference will focus on new initiatives in the prevention, diagnosis, management and investigation of shaken baby syndrome.

**Contact:**

**Saskatchewan Institute  
on Prevention of Handicaps**

**1319 Colony Street**

**Saskatoon, SK S7N 2Z1**

**Tel: (306) 655-2512**

**Fax: (306) 655-2511**

**website:**

**[www.PreventionInstitute.sk.ca](http://www.PreventionInstitute.sk.ca)**



**January 17, 2002**

Toronto, Ontario

**Annual Conference of the Ontario Psychiatric  
Association**

Dr. Bruce Perry will speak on the topic of  
Neurodevelopment and Dissociation: Trauma  
and Adaptive Response to Fear.

More information to follow.



**May 12 to 15, 2002**

Vancouver, British Columbia

**20th Anniversary Symposium on Violence  
Against Women in Relationships**

The symposium will explore and celebrate the initiatives, accomplishments and policy directions that have occurred over the past 20 years to prevent violence against women in relationships. Participants will explore criminal justice, health and community service initiatives. Speakers from across Canada will look at what we have learned, challenges we must face, and emerging issues.

**Contact:**

**Dawna Cousens,**

**Victim Services Division,**

**Community Justice Branch,**

**BC Ministry of Attorney General**

**#302 815 Hornby Street**

**Vancouver, BC V6Z 2E6**

# NEWS

notes • • •



## **Alberta Justice offers self-help books**

Self-help books are now available if you want to represent yourself in Court of Queen's Bench family law cases. The user-friendly manuals cover 27 court applications, including child support, custody and access, restraining orders and protection orders. These books clearly describe the court process and how to fill out forms properly.

If you get stuck filling out the booklets, you can get help at a Family Law Information Centre in Edmonton or Calgary, or you can call the free provincial RITE number at 310-0000 and ask to be connected to the Family Law Information Centre. Booklets will also be available at libraries in major centres.

The printed booklets, containing court forms, are available from all Alberta Court of Queen's Bench locations in courthouses. They cost \$8 each, to cover printing costs.

The information is also available free on the Internet at [www.albertacourts.ab.ca/familylaw/](http://www.albertacourts.ab.ca/familylaw/) or through the Alberta Justice homepage at [www.gov.ab.ca/just](http://www.gov.ab.ca/just) (click on Programs and Services/Family Law Information Centre).



# FIRST NATION-WIDE STUDY ON CHILD MALTREATMENT

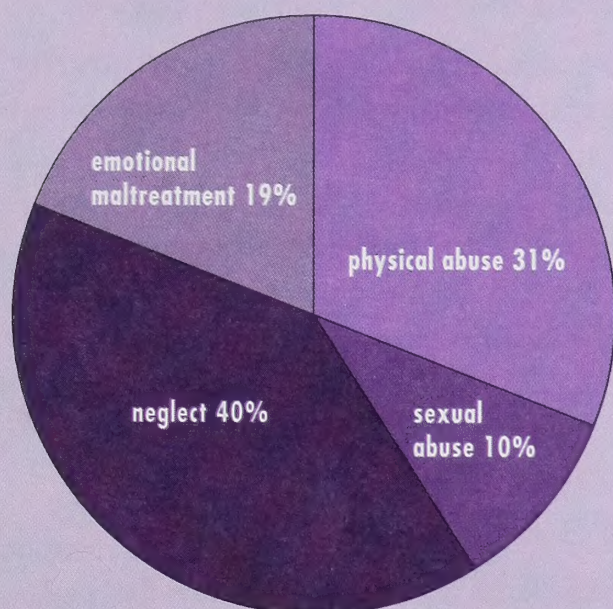
Findings from Canada's first nation-wide study on the incidence of child maltreatment are now available. The study—the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS)—provides a snapshot of children and families across the country who have been investigated for suspected child abuse and neglect.

This study includes statistics on physical and sexual abuse, neglect and emotional maltreatment, based on 7,672 investigations from 51 sites in all provinces and territories.

## Highlights:

- In 1998, there were an estimated 21.5 investigations of child maltreatment per 1,000 children in Canada. Forty-five percent of these investigations were substantiated, 22 percent remained suspected, and 33 percent were found to be unsubstantiated.

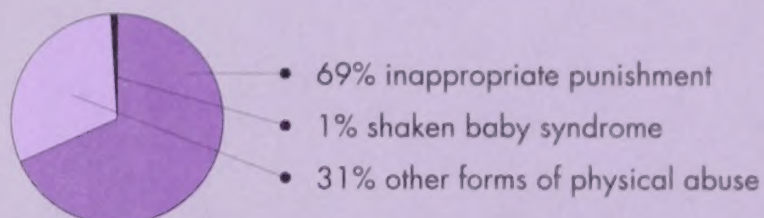
- **Child maltreatment investigations** were divided into four primary categories:



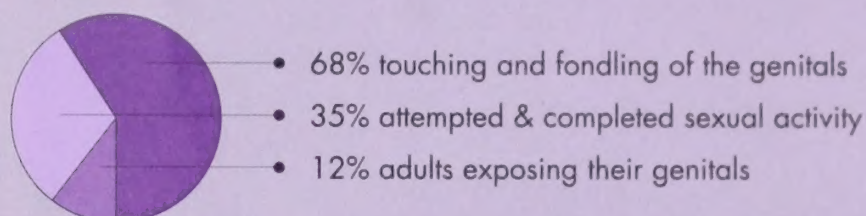
## • Substantiated Investigations:

- physical abuse 34%
- sexual abuse 38%
- neglect 43%
- emotional maltreatment 54%

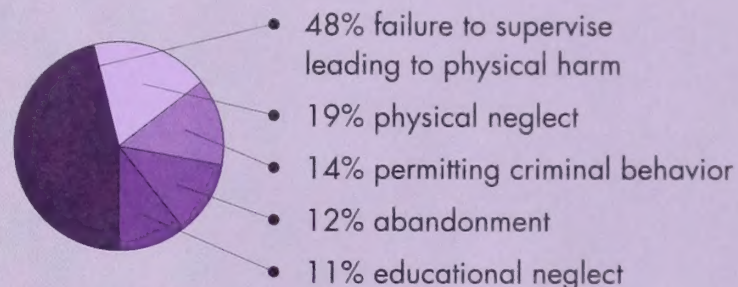
- Substantiated cases of **physical abuse** consisted of:



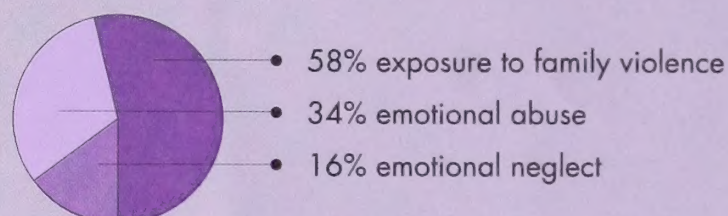
- The most common forms of substantiated **sexual abuse** included:



- The most common forms of substantiated **neglect** included:



- Substantiated cases of **emotional maltreatment** included:



Copies are available from:

**National Clearinghouse  
on Family Violence**

Tel: 1-800-267-1291

website: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn)





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# REVIEWS

## Resource Review . . .

### • • • Award winning website:

[www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)

If you're looking for information on child trauma, make sure you visit [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org).

This comprehensive site is full of information on findings and studies of childhood brain development, proving that environment plays a key role in how the brain grows. It features several interviews with Dr. Bruce Perry, an internationally known child psychologist and pioneer in the study of early brain development.

Included in the site's webpage is a link to the Childtrauma Academy Online University. Here you'll find free online courses that offer creative and practical approaches to understanding and working with maltreated children.

[www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org) has received the "Recognized by 4Therapy.com Award" for providing mental health information to consumers and professionals. 4therapy.com is operated by a large network of professionals dedicated to obtaining quality mental health news, articles and resources.



Visuals courtesy of the Child Trauma Academy.

## F O C U S . . .

**FOCUS** newsletter is published by the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence. We welcome your comments, suggestions, and contributions, especially news about events and activities in your community.

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FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

# NEWS

## Community . . .

### Mentoring expert visits Alberta

High risk children who have a mentor fare better than their unmatched counterparts, said mentoring expert Gary Walker, president of the U.S. social policy organization "Public and Private Ventures" during his visit to Alberta. Walker gave presentations in Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Medicine Hat and Fort McMurray this spring.

His research shows that children with a mentor are 46 percent less likely to use drugs or alcohol, one-third less likely to become involved in school violence and half as likely to skip school. They usually achieve higher grades and develop better relationships with their parents. He said that ages nine to 14 are ideal for mentoring.

**For more information about mentoring, call Big Sisters and Big Brothers at (780) 424-8181 or visit their website at [www.bbbsc.ca](http://www.bbbsc.ca).**